The Power of Art – The life of Mine

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August 10, 2024

The Haywain Triptych

Painted between 1512 and 1515, The Haywain Triptych begins with the outer panels depicting a peddler on a “Pilgrimage of Life,” rendered in vibrant colors. Art critic Ingrid D. Rowland notes that the peddler symbolizes every person navigating life’s dangers, with faith and vigilance being essential to avoiding these perils. This imagery sets the stage for the inner panels, which explore the consequences of sin.

The first inner panel illustrates the expulsion of rebellious angels from Eden, who are transformed into insects as punishment. The central panel shows humanity’s moral decline under Christ’s judgment. The humble figures at the bottom contrast sharply with those consumed by greed, who frantically grab at hay as the hay wagon, driven by devils, heads towards Hell. The final panel offers a vision of Hell still under construction, with devils building a circular tower while sinners are delivered by devilish drivers.

Art historian Pilar Silva interprets the triptych as a warning against the pursuit of material possessions and sensory pleasures, suggesting that true salvation lies in avoiding sin. Wilhelm Fränger proposed an alternative theory, suggesting that the triptych might have been commissioned by a mystery cult rather than the Catholic Church.

Oil on wood – Museo del Prado, Madrid

The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things

Created around 1500, this painting by Hieronymus Bosch continues his exploration of the Last Judgment theme. The central circle depicts Christ emerging from a tomb, surrounded by the Seven Deadly Sins—Wrath, Envy, Greed, Gluttony, Sloth, Lust, and Pride. The Four Last Things—Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell—are shown in the corners of the frame. Underneath Christ is a warning: “Beware, beware, the Lord sees,” with additional text from Deuteronomy emphasizing the consequences of folly and divine judgment.

The Four Last Things illustrate the soul’s journey after death. For example, “Death” shows a dying man, his final rites, and the struggle between a devil and an angel for his soul. “Heaven” depicts angels defending a soul from a devil while welcoming the righteous. The Seven Deadly Sins are shown with vivid scenes: “Wrath” features fighting peasants, “Envy” shows a rich man tempting a woman while her poor parents look on, and “Pride” portrays a wealthy woman admiring herself in a mirror held by the devil.

The painting, on display at Museo del Prado in Madrid, is attributed to Bosch, although some debate exists about its authorship. It is believed to be a collaborative work from his workshop, possibly involving a pupil.

Oil on poplar panel – Museo del Prado, Madrid

The Garden of Earthly Delights

Hieronymus Bosch's "The Garden of Earthly Delights," painted between 1490 and 1510, was created for the wedding of Count Henry II of Nassau's daughter. This triptych illustrates the journey from biblical paradise to the consequences of indulgence and sin. The left panel shows the Garden of Eden with God overseeing the marriage of Adam and Eve. The central panel depicts a hedonistic paradise filled with fantastical creatures and symbols of pleasure, while the right panel portrays a nightmarish Hell for the damned.

The outer panels, painted in gray tones, depict the world's creation. The central scene highlights humanity's pursuit of pleasure and self-gratification, suggesting a transition from innocence to eventual damnation. Bosch's vivid and surreal imagery invites numerous interpretations, from a satire on human sin to reflections on the fleeting nature of earthly pleasures. The painting remains a vivid expression of Bosch's imagination, combining humor and horror in a unique vision of morality and indulgence.

Oil on oak panels – Museo del Prado, Madrid

The Last Judgment

Hieronymus Bosch's "The Last Judgment" is his largest and most intricate work, created between 1482 and 1505. It depicts the final judgment of souls, focusing on Heaven and Hell without including purgatory. Bosch's portrayal emphasizes the horrors of Hell with surreal and disturbing images, contrasting sharply with the calmness of Heaven.

Bosch uses thick brushstrokes to create texture, which differs from the smooth techniques of other painters of his time. The painting features fantastical and grotesque creatures, including transformed angels and monstrous figures. This imaginative approach highlights Bosch's unique vision of the final judgment and the eternal fates of souls.

Oil on wood – Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna

The Adoration of the Magi (c.1494)

Hieronymus Bosch's triptych "The Adoration of the Magi" presents a richly detailed, morally complex vision of the Epiphany narrative. In this painting, the Christ child is shown seated on the Virgin Mary's lap, surrounded by the Magi in elaborate robes. Art historian Pilar Silva notes the influence of Jan van Eyck in the depiction of Mary and Jesus, with Bosch demonstrating exceptional skill in the detailed rendering of the Magi's attire and offerings.

Bosch introduces his characteristic elements through irreverent peasants and shepherds observing the scene with curiosity. The painting also features a bearded figure, an Antichrist, standing menacingly near the stable, and a brothel-like building in the background, symbolizing lust. The scene is further imbued with tension by two armies in the middle distance, identified as Herod's soldiers. The city of Bethlehem in the horizon includes imaginative, exotic architecture and a windmill, enhancing the painting's unique and fantastical quality.

Oil on Oak Panel – Museo del Prado, Madrid